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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

APRIL 1ST, 1864.

## BISHOP'S GLEES.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

SIR HENRY ROWLEY BISHOP is remarkable in the musical annals of this country, as being the only member of his profession that ever received the distinction of knighthood from the hands of an English sovereign; and as having earned this distinction by being almost the single representative of his art among us, at a period when music was perhaps at a lower level here than at any other.\* It is true that during the years in which Bishop made his reputation, there were some eminent instrumentalists—almost unexceptionally foreigners—resident in London; but these were occupied in teaching rather than composition, or if the latter, they rarely did justice to their ability in the works they produced. It is further true that some glee writers were held in high esteem at the time; but their compositions even then scarcely appealed to the general public, and are now only known by the lovers of a special class of music. It would be unjust, however, to esteem Bishop the less because he had no competitors in the position he held; it must be all the more to his honour, that, when nothing existed to excite his emulation, when himself was his only standard of excellence, he gained and maintained a place in general regard, and thus preserved the English musical name from universal oblivion, if not disrespect. The merits of Attwood, Crotch, and Potter are not ignored in the above summary of the pretensions of English musicians at the time under consideration: the first of these had already issued most of the pieces by which he won his popularity, when Bishop first asserted his talent; the second was singularly limited in his sphere of action, and almost exclusive in the public he addressed; and the third did not begin to exercise his influence upon music, until the composer of "The Chough and Crow" was rather living upon, than adding to his fame.

Bishop was born in London on the 18th of November, 1786, and he died here on the 30th of April, 1855. He was a pupil of Francesco Bianchi, who came to this country in 1793 under engagement to compose operas for the King's Theatre, adopted London as his permanent residence, married an English lady, and in 1810 committed suicide. The melodic ease which characterises all Bishop's vocal part-writing may possibly be a consequence of this teacher's admonitions; some strange anomalies in the distribution of voices in his earliest compositions

may as probably be a result of the insufficiency of such admonitions. Apart from personal instruction, Bishop's works show him to have been a careful student; for it could only have been by a process of sedulous self-culture that he could have made himself so familiar with the masterpieces of his art, as to be able to adopt them as models of style at a date when these works had not been publicly performed in England, and could thus but be accessible to him at his private desk.\* Nothing is known of Bianchi, either as to his schooling or its fruits, which sanctions the supposition that he could so have expounded the principles of musical design as to have enabled his otherwise unaided pupil to write the overture to *The Maniac*; nothing warrants the belief that this Italian, whose music is marked by no such traits of saliency, could have infused into his scholar's mind such a perception of the true dramatic element as manifests itself in the chorus "The Tiger couches" in the same work—and this work was Bishop's second opera.

It was very likely to Bianchi's interest that Bishop owed his engagement, in 1806, to write the music of the ballets for the opera. An undated volume of twelve glees, dedicated to Bianchi, the composer avowing himself his pupil, was perhaps published prior to Bishop's engagement at the King's Theatre. The grounds for this assumption are—first, the terms of the dedication, which suggest that the writer was still receiving lessons; second, the internal evidence of the glees, which prompts the surmise that he still wanted lessons, for although some of these pieces number among Bishop's most favorite compositions, the others by no means equal them either in natural idea or technical treatment. Bishop wrote for the King's Theatre a portion of the music of *Tamerlan et Bajazet*, and the whole of that of *Narcisse et les Graces*. In the same year, he wrote two entire ballets for Drury Lane, *Caractacus* and *Love in a Tub*. In conjunction with others, he next wrote incidental music for a forgotten play, *The Mysterious Bride*; and after this, came not again before the public until he produced his first opera, *The Circassian Bride*, on the 23rd of February, 1809, the night of the burning of Drury Lane theatre, which calamity prematurely closed the career of the work, though its publication enables posterity to judge of its merit. In the interval between the conflagration and the opening of the new theatre, the Drury Lane company took refuge at the Lyceum, and there brought out *The Maniac*, with Bishop's music, a work of far higher pretensions to those of its predecessor.

In the autumn of 1810 Bishop was first engaged as composer to Covent Garden theatre, and in discharge of this appointment he wrote music to the following operas and other dramatic

\* Sir George Smart and Sir John Stevenson were knighted by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

\* Mozart's operas were first represented in this country at the following dates:—*La Clemenza di Tito*, 1806; *Così fan Tutte*, 1811; *Il Flauto Magico*, 1811; *Le Nozze di Figaro*, 1812; *Il Don Giovanni*, 1817.

pieces : in 1811, *The Knight of Snowdown* ; in 1812, *The Virgin of the Sun*, *The Ethiop*, and *The Renegade* ; in 1813, *The Brazen Bust*, *Harry le Roy*, *For England, Ho !* and in October, *The Miller and his Men* ; in 1814, *The Farmer's Wife*, one act of *Sadak* and *Kalashade*, *The Wandering Boys*, *The Forest of Bondy*, *Doctor Sangrado*, some additions to *The Maid of the Mill*, and *The Grand Alliance* ; in 1815, *Brother and Sister*, *The Noble Outlaw*, *Telemachus*, *The Magpie*, *John du Bar*, and additions to *Cymon* and to *Comus* ; in 1816, *Guy Mannering* (in conjunction with Whittaker), *The Slave*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Who Wants a Wife*, and *The Royal Nuptials* ; in 1817, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *The Heir of Vironi*, *The Duke of Savoy*, and *The Father and his Children* ; in 1818, a portion of *Zuma*, *The Illustrious Traveller*, and *December and May* ; in 1819, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, *The Gnome King*, *A Comedy of Errors*, *Fortunatus*, *Swedish Patriotism*, and *A Rowland for an Oliver* ; in 1820, *The Antiquary*, *The Battle of Bothwell Brigg*, *Henri Quatre*, and *Twelfth Night*, in 1821, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a portion of *Don John*, *Montrose*, *The Law of Java*, and *Maid Marian* ; in 1823, *Clari*, *The Beacon of Liberty*, and *Cortez* ; and in 1824, *Native Land* and *Charles II.*

Besides fulfilling these busy theatrical duties, Bishop assisted in the establishment of the Philharmonic Society in 1813, of which he was often a director, and at whose concerts he officiated in turn with others as conductor. In 1819 he undertook the speculation, in partnership with the management of Covent Garden, of the miscellaneous concerts, then called Oratorios ; and in 1820 he entered upon the entire responsibility of these performances. The thirty years since the Westminster Festival of 1834 have wrought such a total change in the state of music in England, that anyone whose experience reaches not back beyond this period, and whose notions of the oratorio are drawn from the complete works presented to the public by the Sacred Harmonic Society and the more recent institutions that have pursued the same only artistic system—anyone who has been taught to regard a work of musical art as embodying a comprehensive design, may wonder at, if not discredit, the records of the mongrel miscellanies that, in the preceding years, desecrated the name of Oratorio, no less than profaned the solemn subjects with which this is associated. It was Handel who first obtained a licence—and this with the royal sanction and personal patronage—for the performance of sacred musical compositions on the Wednesdays and Fridays during Lent, on the anniversary of King Charles's execution, and on Whitsun-Eve—nights on which the theatres were not allowed to be open for secular entertainments ; his Oratorio of *Esther*, originally written for private performance, was

the first work of its class publicly produced in England, and its great success in 1732 induced the composition of the long series of masterpieces which form the basis of Handel's mighty reputation. It was at one of these Lenten performances, seven days before his death in 1759, that the great master of sacred song was last seen in public. Various success, fluctuating with the rule of fashion and the force of party, had attended the speculations from year to year ; and prejudice which at first condemned the appropriation of any scriptural theme as an exercise of a musician's genius, and taken violent exception against the opening of theatres for any purposes upon the appointed fast days, had so far relaxed its severity as to suffer without a protest the production of works of secular character, such as *Alexander's Feast*, &c., at these Lenten entertainments. Still, if these performances were not restricted to sacred works, their artistic integrity was never violated, and this preserved for them an earnest importance which commanded the respect, if not always elicited the support, of the public. After the death of the great originator of the Oratorio in England, the Lenten performances of musical works of the same pretension were annually continued by John Christopher Smith, who was succeeded in their management by Stanley and others ; but early in the present century, though the concerts retained the name of Oratorios, they by degrees totally changed their character, and it became the exception, rather than the rule, for any Oratorio besides *Messiah* to be performed at them. Their programmes consisted for the most part of a heterogeneous selection of sacred and secular music of all styles and all classes, most rarely including any complete work that extended beyond a single movement, and always planned to meet the public taste rather than to lead it. It was upon this principle that Bishop managed the so-called Oratorios at the period above mentioned and in subsequent seasons when he again entered upon the speculation ; and this was in character with the whole tenour of his artistic policy, which, as will be shown, was ever to reduce art to the popular standard, and not to aim at raising the power of appreciation in the public, by producing the best works in the best manner. Traces of this policy are obvious in his compositions ; and the world has to regret, in its workings, not only that the powerful influence of a gifted and accomplished musician should have been exercised less to advance than to conciliate the taste of the people who confided in him ; but, still more, that by thus putting manacles upon his own genius, he scarcely presented himself faithfully in his works, and so gave posterity little means of estimating his true artistic power. It is only when an artist produces his best, in whatever path he labours, that his works possess the principle of life ; and this fact has no stranger exemplification than will arise from the comparison of the vast

amount Bishop produced, with the small proportion of this which is now regarded—what is at present unknown was written for the time and died with the time, being ephemeral as the applause, to court which was his only aim—what is still remembered is that which manifests the individuality of the composer, and will be as fresh therefore, and as full of interest to future generations, as it was in the hour of its production.

The temptation of increased terms induced Bishop to quit the scene of all his successes in 1824, and transfer his services from Covent Garden to Drury Lane theatre; but he carried not with him his former fortune. He continued not, it is true, his habit of rapid production; but it is to be questioned whether greater care for the work on which he was engaged, or greater care to avoid work altogether, was the cause of his new practice, either more rigorous or more dilatory. His dramatic productions from this period were as follows:—in 1825, *The Fall of Algiers*, Sheridan Knowles' *William Tell*, *Angelina*, *Edward the Black Prince*, *The Coronation of Charles X.*, and *Faustus*; in 1826, *Aladdin* and *The Knights of the Cross*; in 1827, *Englishmen in India*; these were all written for Drury Lane. Bishop then returned to Covent Garden theatre, where he produced the musical dramas of *Home Sweet Home*, *The Romance of a Day*, and *Yelva*. These pieces were succeeded by *The Tyrolese Peasant* and *The Doom Kiss*, both given at Drury Lane, the latter in 1832. He next wrote music for *The Rencontre* and *Rural Felicity*, brought out at the Haymarket; and then set the lyrics in Byron's *Manfred* for performance at Covent Garden in the autumn of 1834. Lastly, *The Fortunate Isles*, an allegory in honour of the Queen's nuptials, was produced at Covent Garden some weeks after the event it was designed to celebrate, and it closed the composer's theatrical career.

In enumerating the theatrical productions of this prolific writer, one must not omit to name his adaptations, so-called of foreign operas to the English stage; since these were in some cases nearly as much entitled to be esteemed original compositions, as were many of his works that were announced as such; and since with their mutilations and interpolations they may as justly be accredited with retarding the taste for music in this country as may anything else Bishop brought before the world be believed to have advanced it. They were Boieldieu's *Jean de Paris*, Mozart's *Nozze de Figaro*, and *Don Giovanni*, a compilation from Paesello's and Rossini's *Barbiere de Siviglia*, Weber's *Freischütz*, Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* under the name of *Hofer*, and Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* under the name of *The Devil's Son*.

Bishop's talent was not exclusively appropriated to the stage: a sacred cantata, *The Seventh Day*, was written in fulfilment of a commission

from the Philharmonic Society in 1833; an oratorio, *The Fallen Angel*, and the Ode for the installation of the Earl of Derby at Oxford in 1853 (his last work), have not been published; and a countless number of songs, duets, and other detached pieces, swell the list of his very voluminous compositions.

A rare and very high compliment was paid to the genius of Bishop, in the summer of 1839, by the lovers of music in Manchester, who then gave a concert consisting exclusively of his music which they invited him to conduct, and the proceeds of which they presented to him as a testimonial of their estimation of the services he had rendered his art.

In 1840, after Mr. Knyvett's retirement from the office, Bishop was occasionally engaged as conductor of the Concerts of Ancient Music; and from 1843 till the discontinuance of these performances in 1848, he was the sole conductor. This appointment brought him under the notice of Prince Albert, who was one of the Directors of the Concerts, taking turn with his royal, noble, and reverend colleagues to select the music for particular nights. It is believed to have been at the Prince's suggestion that Bishop was singled out from all English musicians for the honour of knighthood, which was conferred on him in 1842, and there was certainly no one whose position in general esteem so well justified the choice. In the musical chair of Edinburgh, from 1841 till 1843, and in that of Oxford, from 1848 till his death, Bishop proved himself a professor without practice, doing little to show that the appointments he held were other than sinecures. He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Music when his installation Ode was performed, having graduated as Bachelor several years earlier. He frequently lectured on music at the Polytechnic and other popular institutions, but his lectures were in character with his whole career, looking up to his hearers rather than striving to elevate them to what should have been the level of the teacher. Certain of these lectures, however, are believed to have peculiar interest, as detailing the circumstances under which his own works were produced; they were purchased at the sale of the author's effects by Mr. Blockley, and I much regret that this gentleman has not allowed me the privilege of perusing them, as I suppose this would have enabled me to give more perfect authenticity to the account I am about to offer of Bishop's compositions, than can be derived from public advertisements of the respective dates, and from general hearsay.

#### CRYSTAL PALACE CONCERTS.

WE are glad to perceive that these Concerts still preserve the high character they have obtained since they have been placed under the able direction of Mr. Manns. Not only are the best artists engaged, but it seems that it is at Sydenham—and not in the heart of the metropolis—that we are to look for novelty, since it is here that new composers and new performers are often to be heard for the